

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 MCT-01 ACDA-12 OMB-01 /113 W
-----008846 230607Z /14

R 211023Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4685
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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E. O. 11652: NA
TAGS; PINS, IS, RP
SUBJECT: ISLAMIC CONFERENCE CONSIDERATION OF THE SOUTH-
ERN PHILIPPINES CONFLICT

1. THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT (GOP) HAS SENT THREE
AMBASSADORS TO THE ISLAMIC FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE
IN DAKAR. THE THREE, AMBASSADORS PACIFICO CASTRO
(FORMERLY IN ALGIERS), LININDING PANGANDAMAN (JIDDA) AND
MONICO VINCENTE (LIBREVILLE), WILL ENGAGE PRINCIPALLY IN
A DAMAGE-LIMITING MISSION. THEIR PURPOSE WILL BE TO
PERSUADE THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE (IC) THAT THE FIGHTING
IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES IS A DOMESTIC AFFAIR, THAT
THE GOP IS SINCERELY ATTEMPTING TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT
PEACEFULLY AS WELL AS TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE ECONOMIC,
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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PROBLEMS OF THE AREA. THEIR GOAL
IS TO FORESTALL INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN SUPPORT
OF THE MNLF. THE PHILIPPINES WILL AGAIN ATTEMPT TO
OBTAIN OBSERVER STATUS AT THE CONFERENCE; IN THE PAST
THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ACCORDED THIS STATUS WHILE THE MNLF
HAS.

2. THIS YEAR'S DISCUSSION OF THE PHILIPPINE PROBLEM WILL DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM PAST ONES, DUE TO THE PRESENCE OF AN IC OBSERVER IN THE PHILIPPINES, LTC. LAMINE CISSE, A SENEGALESE ARMY OFFICER ASSIGNED TO THE MINDANAO CEASEFIRE COMMISSION. IN THE PAST THE IC HAD TO RELY ON THE REPORTS BY THE PARTICIPANTS, THE MNLF AND THE GOP, AND OCCASIONALLY SHORT-TERM VISITORS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE PHILIPPINES.

3. DESPITE THE DE JURE EXISTENCE OF A CEASEFIRE IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES, THE LEVEL OF FIGHTING IS AS HIGH NOW AS DURING THE PRE-CEASEFIRE PERIOD AND APPEARS TO HAVE INCREASED DURING THE LAST MONTH; GENERALIZED FIGHTING IS OCCURRING THROUGHOUT WESTERN MINDANAO AND THE SULU ARCHEPELAGO. THE GOVERNMENT-GUIDED LOCAL PRESS HAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO MAJOR MNLF OFFENSIVE ACTIONS, WHICH IT PORTRAYS AS TERRORISM: E. G., FIFTY SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS WERE REPORTED KILLED IN AN AMBUSH APRIL 13 IN MAGUINDANAO, AND THREE CIVILIANS WERE KILLED AND 53 INJURED IN A GRENADE ATTACK IN BASILAN'S CAPITAL OF ISABELA APRIL 20. GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS GENERALLY ARE NOT REPORTED IN THE PRESS IN ORDER TO FORESTALL CHARGES OF GENOCIDE.

4. THE IC WILL ALSO FACE THE PROBLEM OF THE DISPUTE FOR LEADERSHIP OF THE MNLF BETWEEN CURRENT CHAIRMAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NUR MISUARI AND HIS RIVAL HASHIM SALAMAT. SALAMAT, FORMER "FOREIGN MINISTER" OF THE MNLF, HAS CHARGED THAT MISUARI IS A COMMUNIST AND IS SEEKING SECESSION RATHER THAN AUTONOMY FOR PHILIPPINE MUSLIMS. THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN TALKING TO SALAMAT AND WOULD PREFER TO DEAL WITH HIM RATHER THAN MISUARI. THE GOP IS RELUCTANT, HOWEVER, TO DISPLAY ITS PREFERENCE OPENLY LEST IT REDOUND TO SALAMAT'S, AND ULTIMATELY THE GOP'S DISADVANTAGE.

5. COMMENT: BOTH THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT AND THE MNLF ARE LOOKING TO THE IC FOR HELP IN PURSUING THE MINDANAO CONFLICT. CONFIDENT THAT TIME IS ON ITS SIDE, THE GOP WILL BE CONTENT IF THE CONFERENCE DOES NOTHING, LEAVING THE MNLF TO FEND FOR ITSELF. THOUGH ITS MAXIMUM GOAL WOULD BE RECOGNITION OF SALAMAT AS NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE MNLF, IT CERTAINLY WILL BE HAPPY IF THE CONFERENCE ADOPTS AN ATTITUDE OF BENIGN NEGLECT. THE MNLF, ON THE OTHER HAND, HOPES TO ELICIT WHATEVER CONCRETE SUPPORT IT CAN FROM THE ISLAMIC STATES. IDEALLY IT DESIRES SUPPORT ON TWO LEVELS: FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT, AND ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE AGAINST

THE PHILIPPINES. STULL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MOSLEMS, MINISTERIAL MEETINGS, COMBAT OPERATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MANILA06446
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780173-0323
Format: TEL
From: MANILA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780431/aaaababj.tel
Line Count: 117
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 1019efa9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2893462
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ISLAMIC CONFERENCE CONSIDERATION OF THE SOUTH- ERN PHILIPPINES CONFLICT
TAGS: PINS, MOPS, IS, RP, MNLF
To: STATE BANGKOK
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/1019efa9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014